

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00

SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01

SAM-01 SAJ-01 /078 W

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O R 041857Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4839

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY OSLO

US MISSION NATO 796

USEC BRUSSELS

USCINCEUR

DOD

DIA

US MISSION GENEVA 835

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E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, SP

SUBJECT: GENERAL STRIKE AND SUBSTANTIAL VIOLENCE IN VITORIA
RESULT IN TWO DEATHS

REF: MADRID 1542

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BEGIN SUMMARY: ON MARCH 3 A GENERAL STRIKE EFFECT IN THE BASQUE CITY OF VITORIA, CAPITAL OF ALAVA PROVINCE, IN WHICH 18,000 WORKERS WERE ORIGINALLY INVOLVED DEGENERATED INTO SUBSTANTIAL, APPARENTLY WELL-ORGANIZED VIOLENCE, INVOLVING 2,000 DEMONSTRATORS. THE POLICE WHO WERE UNPREPARED FOR THE CHALLENGE, LOST CONTROL OF THE CITY FOR APPROXIMATELY FOUR HOURS AND IN THE PITCHED BATTLES THAT RESULTED, THERE WERE 3 DEATHS OF DEMONSTRATORS AND NUMEROUS INJURIES, SOME SERIOUS, TO BOTH POLICE AND DEMONSTRATORS. TODAY THE CITY IS QUIET, UNDER MASSIVE POLICE DEPLOYMENT, BUT PAMPLONA IN NEIGHBORING NAVARRA HAS EXPERIENCED DEMONSTRATORS POLICE CLASHES ON A LESSOR SCALE. THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING BARCELONA, FUNCTIONS NORMALLY, ASIDE FROM SOME STRIKE ACTIVITY, BUT THE VITORIA EVENTS CONSTITUTE THE MOST SERIOUS PUBLIC ORDER PROBLEM SINCE THE DEATH OF FRANCO AND HAVE CREATED CONSIDERABLE UNEASE. END OF SUMMARY.

1. VITORIA, HURT SOMEWHAT BY THE RECESSION, HAD BEEN THE SCENE OF STRIKE ACTIVITY OVER THE PAST WEEKS BY SOME 4,000 WORKERS, BUT THE SITUATION SEEMED NOWHERE AS TENSE AS IN SOME OTHER PARTS OF SPAIN WHERE NOTHING LIKE YEATERDAY'S VIOLENCE HAS OCCURED. AN EFFORT WAS MADE IN VITORIA LAST WEEK TO PROMOTE A "DAY OF STRUGGLE" OR GENERAL STRIKE ATTEMPT, WHICH RESULTED IN FAILURE. BUT VIRTUALLY ALL CLANDESTINE LABOR GROUPS IN VITOTIA CONVOKED ANOTHER "DAY OF STRUGGLE" OR GENERAL STRIKE ATTEMPT FOR MARCH 3.

2. MARCH 3 COMMENCED WITH PICKETS OUTSIDE FACTORIES URGING NON-STIKING WORKERS TO PARTICIPATE, AND AN ESTIMATED 18.000 WORKERS FROM 72 VITORIA FIRMS JOINED IN. LOCAL GOVT HAD WARNED PREVIOUSLY NO PROTEST MANIFESTATIONS WOULD BE PERMITTED, VIOLENCE ERUPTED ALMOST FROM OUTSET, WITH WORKERS RAISING BARRICADES AND BLOCKING STREETS, AND WITH FREQUENT CLASHES WITH POLICE. WORST CLASH OCCURRED LATER WHEN POLICE CHARGED A FEW THOUSAND STIKERS AND SYMPATHIZERS WHO WERE HOLDING A PROTEST ASSEMBLY IN AND AROUND VITORIA CHURCH, RESULTING IN A FIERCE BATTLE IN WHICH RUNNER BULLETS, TEAR GAS, PAVING STONES FROM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEMONSTRATORS, AND FINALLY POLICE WEAPONS WERE USED. THREE DEOMSTRATORS WERE KILLED, AND VARIOUS PERSONS SERIOUSLY INJURED. REST OF DAY WAS CHARACTERIZED BY VIOLENCE AND DISORDER, IN WHICH UNPREPARED POLICE LOST CONTROL OF THE CITY FOR ABOUT FOUR HOURS, AS ABOUT 2,000 REPORTEDLY WELL-ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATORS ENGAGED IN SYTEMATIC VIOLENCE, ENGAGING IN CONTINUED CLASHES WITH POLICE, OVERTURNING AND BURNING CARS, AND EVEN THROWING MOLOTOV

COCKTAILS OR OTHER EXPLOSIVE DEVICES WHICH SERIOUSLY INJURED A POLICE INSPECTOR WHO IS SERIOUS CONDITION.

3. POLICE WERE RUSHED INTO VITORIA DURING DAY FROM NEARBY PROVINCES TO HELP VITORIA POLICE AND BY EVENING SITUATION WAS REPORTEDLY QUIET. AT MID-DAY TODAY VITORIA WAS COMPLETELY QUIET, ALTHOUGH ITS FACTORIES AND COMMERCES WERE CLOSED DOWN TIGHT AN THERE WAS A MASSICE POLICE PRESENCE.

4. THE GNERARAL STRIKE EFFORT IN VITORIA, WHICH BEGAN THE VIOLENCE, REFLECTED A VERY HIGH DEGREE OF COORDINATION BY CLANDESTINE LABOR GROUPS. IT'S SPONSORS REPORTEDLY INCLUDED MOST CLANDESTINE LABOR GROUPS INCLUDING MODERATES, COMMUNIST,AND SOME EXTREMIST LEFTISTS (SOURCES OF OUR BILBAO CONSUL SAY ONE OF ELEMENTS WHICH HAS REPORTEDLY RECENTLY STRENGTHENED IT PRESENCE IN VITORIA AREA HAS BEEN REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE (LCR), THE PRINCIPLA SPANISH TROTSKYITE GROUP.)

5. ALTHOUGH VITORIA IS REPORTEDLY QUIET TODAY. THERE AREREPOROTED TO HAVE BEEN LESSER BUT COMPARABLE INCIDENTS THIS MORNING IN PAMPLONA, WHERE STRIKING WORKERS TRIED TO MARCH INTO THE CITY, CLASHED WITH POLICE CAUSING NUMEROUS INJURIES, BUT FORTUNATELY NO DEATHS.

6. ELSE WHERE THINGS REPORTEDLY ARE QUIET TODAY. VARIOUS LOCALITIES HAVE BEEN EXPERIENCING STIKES IN RELATION TO LOCAL LABOR PROBLEMS DURING PAST WEEK, INCLUDING VIGO, ASTIRIAS COAL MINING AREA, AND BILBAO. IN BARCELONA WHERE THERE HAS BEEN PUBLIC REPUDIATION OF LAST WEEKS DAY OF VIOLENCE, EFFORT TO MOUNT A "DAY OF STRUGGLE" LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MARCH 3 WAS REPORTEDLY TOTAL FAILURE, AND BOTH MADRID AND BARCELONA HAVE AN AIR STIKE (REF) IS STILL UNRESOLVED AND IS GRADUALLY CAUSING SUPPLY PROBLEMS.

7. COMMENT: (A) VITORIA FRACAS IS WORST SUCH EPISODE SINCE FRANCO ERA SHIPYARD STRIKE IN EL FERROL IN 1972 (B) POLICE WITH WHOM THERE ARE SOME LONG STANDING EMNITIES IN BASQUE PROVINCES, WERE UNPREPARED, NOT USED TO HANDLING DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE SOPHISTICATED STYLE OF THEIR MADRID AND BARCELONA COLLEAGUES AND WERE CORNERED: (C) WHILE STRIKE WAS CONVOKED BY WIDE RANGE OF OPPOSITION GROUPS, MOST OF THEM ARE SUPPOSESLY AGAINST VIOLENCE, YET THERE IS WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT SOME GROUP OR GROUPS ORGANIZED THE VIOLENCE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF URBAN DISCONTENT: (D) THIS MORNINGS

FEAR THAT VIOLENCE OF URBAN DISCONTENT: (D) THIS MORNINGS
FEAR THAT VIOLENCE WOULD SPILL OVER TO A NUMBER OF PLACES
IN THE NORTH OF SAPIN DID NOT COME TRUE BUT POTENTIAL
MARTYRS HAVE BEEN CREATED: (E) THE GENERAL
POPULACE DOES NOT WELCOME VIOLENCE AND YESTERDAY'S
EVENTS WILL CAUSE CONSIDERABLE UNEASE: (F) THERE
IS POSSIBILITY THAT SPANISH MILITARY MAY FEEL THERE
IS COORDINATED SUBVERSIVE PLOT REQUIRING
CONSIDERATION OF MARTIAL LAW ON LOCAL SCALE, THOUGH WE
ARE SURE THEY WILL BE RELUCTION TO TAKE THIS STEP.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, GENERAL STRIKES, CIVIL DISORDERS, VITORIA, LABOR UNIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MADRID01709
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760084-0213
From: MADRID
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760395/aaaadgcx.tel
Line Count: 180
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MADRID 1542
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 MAR 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <08 JUL 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GENERAL STRIKE AND SUBSTANTIAL VIOLENCE IN VITORIA RESULT IN TWO DEATHS
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, SP
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006